

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, earlier this week, myself, Senator CASSIDY, and Senator CORNYN, along with 35 of our Republican colleagues, introduced an effort to block President Biden's plan to transfer student loan debt onto the back of hard-working Americans. This includes ending the pause on student loan payments, which has been extended six times since the start of the pandemic.

What might seem like a "free pass" in making payments on student loans is, actually, a scheme orchestrated by the Biden administration that could cost taxpayers an estimated \$900 billion.

Let's break it down: \$400 billion to cancel student loan debt, \$195 billion to pause loan payments and interest accrued during the pandemic, and \$200 billion to implement President Biden's loan repayment rule.

Folks, \$900 billion is more than the Federal Government has ever spent on higher education in our Nation's history. To give you some additional perspective, this radical proposal costs—get this, folks—three times more than what the government will spend on Pell grants in this decade—in this decade—a program designed to help our neediest students.

This is not debt cancellation. It is socialism.

President Biden is rewarding those who chose the path of higher education by strapping their debt onto the backs of those who did not.

This is a personal issue to me.

My brother chose to enter the workforce directly out of high school. My brother is a hard-working union laborer.

My sister worked to put herself through community college. She received an associate's degree in Southwest Iowa. She works for a trucking company and farms.

Their stories are similar to many Iowans across my home State. Why should countless Americans who made responsible, financial planning decisions be forced to take on the debts of others?

Biden's plan is unfair and unaffordable. It is fanning the flames of inflation and is a driving factor in our growing Federal debt. Most importantly, this transfer of student loan debt does nothing to address and may actually be contributing to the real issue of rising costs to attend college.

What message does this send to veterans who pursue higher education through the GI bill or medical professionals who joined the National Health Service Corps?

I was able to cover a portion of my college tuition at Iowa State University through an ROTC scholarship. Joining the Army after graduation was a privilege and an honor. I made a commitment to my country, and, in return, they made a commitment to me to help me receive my college degree.

President Biden's radical proposal invalidates many other successful loan

forgiveness and repayment programs designed to incentivize participation in critical fields, including the military, public service, and medicine.

Instead of putting a bandaid on the problem and passing the buck, we should be giving students and their families a clear picture up front about the true costs associated with their education. That is why I am working in a bipartisan way to ensure that students know, before they take out a loan, the estimated total interest amount based on their repayment plan.

Folks, we have warned for years that the left is on the march toward socialism. Look no further than Biden's student debt transfer plan.

I am proud to join my Republican colleagues in working to stop this scheme.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

NOMINATION OF RICHARD R. VERMA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I am extremely pleased that the Senate will be voting shortly to confirm Ambassador Richard Verma to be the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources at the Department of State. This role is one of the most critical positions at the Department of State.

DMR, as it is known, has wide-ranging responsibility for overseeing personnel and ensuring the Department is sufficiently resourced to carry out effective U.S. diplomacy.

And there are no shortages of challenges. As we reorient our foreign policy toward strategic competition with China, as we counter malign influence by Russia across the globe, as we work to address global health, food insecurity, and climate crisis, it is imperative that our diplomatic corps has the tools they need to address the challenges ahead.

Ambassador Verma is superbly qualified to lead this part of the Department in confronting these challenges. His long public sector career, which includes service in the Air Force, the Senate, and the State Department, will help him be an effective leader who can advance the Department's modernization agenda.

And as our first-ever Indian-American Ambassador to New Delhi, he has firsthand experience leading a major U.S. Embassy and a deep understanding of the strategic advantage of cultivating and retaining a diverse and expert workforce.

I have full confidence that Ambassador Verma will be a constructive partner with Congress and work to make sure the Department has the support, the resources, and the leadership it needs to succeed.

Given the challenges ahead, I am pleased that we are finally voting to confirm Ambassador Verma today, and I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this nomination.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Richard R. Verma, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 5 minutes of debate, equally divided, on the nomination.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON VERMA NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Verma nomination?

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), and the Senator from Missouri

The nomination was confirmed. (Mr. SCHMITT).

The result was announced—yeas 67, nays 26, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 81 Ex.]

YEAS—67

Baldwin	Heinrich	Romney
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hirono	Rounds
Booker	Kaine	Sanders
Boozman	Kelly	Schatz
Brown	King	Schumer
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Capito	Lujan	Sinema
Cardin	Manchin	Smith
Carper	Markey	Stabenow
Casey	Marshall	Tester
Collins	Menendez	Thune
Coons	Merkley	Tillis
Cornyn	Moran	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Mullin	Warner
Cramer	Murphy	Warnock
Crapo	Murray	Warren
Duckworth	Ossoff	Welch
Durbin	Padilla	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Peters	Wyden
Graham	Reed	Young
Grassley	Ricketts	
Hassan	Risch	

NAYS—26

Blackburn	Cruz	Hyde-Smith
Braun	Daines	Johnson
Britt	Ernst	Kennedy
Budd	Fischer	Lankford
Cassidy	Hawley	Lee
Cotton	Hoeben	Lummis

Paul	Scott (SC)	Vance
Rubio	Sullivan	Wicker
Scott (FL)	Tuberville	

NOT VOTING—7

Barrasso	Hagerty	Schmitt
Feinstein	McConnell	
Fetterman	Murkowski	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session.

The Senator from Texas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1082

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I wish we were not here facing these issues yet again. In recent days, our Nation has seen yet another horrific school shooting. In September of last year, I stood on the Senate floor and tried to pass legislation to stop these school shootings. There have been too damn many. I have been there on the ground at too damn many of them.

Sante Fe High School in Texas, about 45 minutes away from my house—the morning of that shooting, I got the call within minutes of the shooting. I was down on campus just over an hour after it occurred. I saw the tragedy, the tears, the grieving parents, the children in shock.

Uvalde, I was there shortly after that shooting as well—the horror, the mayhem.

Too many of our children have been murdered by deranged lunatics.

Mr. President, when you and I were kids, this wasn't a thing. When you went to school, when I went to school, there wasn't a single day that I woke up going to school worried that some idiot, some sociopath, was going to shoot up the school. You might worry about getting punched at recess, but this didn't happen 30, 40, 50 years ago. Now it is a brutal reality over and over again.

There are lots of causes that we could debate for a long time: causes in our culture; causes of disconnected, emotionally disturbed young men who want to become famous. I think Columbine may have started this whole tragic cycle where an angry young person seeks to lash out by murdering little kids.

With respect to becoming famous, one rule I try to follow is that I will never say the names of these mass murderers. If they want to be well-known, I hope everyone in elected office—I would like everyone in the news media to follow that rule as well. They deserve to be forgotten in utter obscurity.

But we also have an obligation to stop this. Every time there is a mass murder, there is a pattern that plays out. No. 1, there is an expression of

grief, of love for the community. There are millions of us who lift the community up in prayer. Inevitably, that produces a response from the political left where they scream in unison: Thoughts and prayers aren't enough.

I will tell you, Mr. President, I believe in the power of prayer, and I will continue praying for communities that are hurting, whether from a natural disaster or a horrific crime or anything else. But I agree with the sentiment “thoughts and prayers are not enough.” That is exactly right. We need action.

And what is so infuriating is, every time there is a mass shooting, Democrats in this Chamber stand up, and they don't actually want to do something to stop the murderers. Instead, they want another gun control bill to disarm law-abiding citizens that won't actually stop the murders, that won't actually protect our kids.

In September of last year, I introduced legislation that would be the most far-reaching school safety legislation ever enacted. It would double the number of police officers on campuses, devoting \$15 billion to putting armed police officers on campus to protect our kids, the single most important step we can do. It would also devote \$10 billion for mental health professionals on campuses because so many of these troubled murderers had warning signs leaping off the page. It also devotes \$2.56 billion for physical security at schools to help enhance the security of schools.

When I introduced this bill, it first came up as an amendment on the much-touted bipartisan gun control bill last year that did nothing to stop violent crime but satisfied the leftwing donors of the Democratic Party. When my amendment was voted on, on the Senate floor, I am sorry to say every single Democrat in this Chamber voted no—all of them, every one.

Afterwards, I went to this floor, I stood on this floor, and I tried to pass the bill by unanimous consent. And when that happened, the Senator from Connecticut stood up and objected.

Now, I have to say, leading up to that unanimous consent request, numerous reporters had asked me in the hallway: Why are the Democrats objecting to this?

And I was forced to say “I do not know,” because, to date, they have not articulated any reason. They have not explained why they oppose more police officers in schools. They have not explained why they oppose more mental health counselors in schools. They have not explained why they oppose more funding for enhanced physical security in schools.

So I was quite interested to hear the Senator from Connecticut give his reasons. I was disappointed that day. The Senator from Connecticut stood up and uttered two words: “I object.” Then he sat down. That was it. His answer was just no.

Mr. President, I stood on this floor then, and I said something that—I said:

God forbid there is going to be another school shooting—I pray to God there isn't—but we are going to find a day when another one of these happens, another deranged lunatic commits this kind of mass murder. And if there is not a police officer at the front door, I said, remember this moment, remember this moment. Because if the Senator from Connecticut had not stood up and said “I object,” this bill would have passed the Senate unanimously.

If this bill had passed into law, \$15 billion to double the number of police officers on campus—and that was available at public schools, at private schools, at parochial schools—what that would have meant is that there is a very real possibility an armed police officer would have been at the front door of the Covenant School in Nashville.

As we look at what happened, every one of us—every one of us—who is a parent or a grandparent is beyond horrified at what sort of deranged person murders little children, but we also know that that shooter came to the front door and shot the front door open. If this bill had passed, funding for school security, that front door could have been made more secure so the shooter couldn't have blasted in.

But even more importantly, what many of us have watched in the body cam footage is horrific. It is deeply disturbing. But, I will tell you, it is also awe-inspiring. You saw the Nashville police officers arrive on campus about 15 minutes after the shooting began. They enter the campus. They are scared. They don't know what is going on, but they are looking for the shooter. They are wearing bulletproof vests. They are searching for the shooter. They are going up the stairs, and they hear the sound of gunshots. The police officers do what police officers should do: They head toward the shots. They risk their lives. And they encounter the shooter and shoot the shooter dead.

The heroism of those officers saved lives that day. If this bill had passed, those officers might not have been 15 minutes away; they might have been standing at the front door. The purpose of this bill was to have those officers at the front door so that when the deranged shooter showed up and tried to shoot in the door, the officers could stop the shooter right there and then, which would have meant that not a single child needed to die.

I told this body that if we didn't act, the consequences would be horrific. Yet the sad reality—I do not understand why our Democrat colleagues in this body do not support having police officers keep our kids safe; why, when it comes to this issue, the only thing that interests them is disarming the people at home who pose no threat rather than protecting our kids.

As I said, I wish I wasn't back here today. I wish this had passed last year. I wish Democrats were willing to work together on really solving this problem. But, sadly, this pattern replays over and over again.